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ABSTRACT

Focusing on Rumania, this paper studies the relationship between the values system of the technological era and the implications for education. With increasing industralization and technological development, many societies have emerged as highly utilitarian in which all values are subordinated to acquisitive behavior, materialism, and individual egotistic achievement. Yet the fundamentally antiutilitarian ethical, Marxist humanism retains as its highest ideal the transformation of man from a means into a goal. A survey of Rumanian youth indicates a commitment to the humanist ideal of socialism based on equity and social justice. According to Marxist humanism, the principal requirements of contemporary education should be the stimulation of creativity within the student, placing him in a position of choice and guiding his free and conscious option toward the most advanced alternatives, the increase in the role of self-education, the education for many-sided student personalities and their filfillment, the permanent assertion of freedom and autonomy of personality as the basis for socialization, and the development of human values. (Author/DE)

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THE ETHOS OF THE "TECHNOLOGICAL ERA", THE NEW ERA OF THE SOCIOLOGY
OF MORALS AND THE ETHICAL EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

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1. The problem. The contribution of sociology in defining the aims of present development of education involves a deeper study of the impact which revolution, science and technology produce on ethos in the contemporary era.

Reffering to the necessity of reappraising the relationship between sociology and education, professor Miron Constantinescu writes: "If sociology is to specify, on studying reality, the pattern of future society and the pathways towards its realisation, naturally in close cooperation with political sciences, the educational sciences are to specify, to answer these questions of paramount significance: what type of man are we training ? how are we to train him ? We have in view the conditions in which these two sciences are acting in this era of profound social changes, of deep scientific and technical changes"[1].

On the basis of several surveys carried on in Rumania - the paper intends to contribute to the study of the relationship between the ethos of the "technological era" and the implications for education. A renewal of the sociology of morals in the light of the Marxist theory is regarded as essential for this purpose.

2. The thesis of the utilitarian monism of ethics in the "technological era".

2.1. From among the multitude of problems posed to sociological analysis by the trends of contemporary development - let us consider the thesis upheld by some sociologists according to which "the technological era" is inherently bound to a utilitarian ethical monism, seen as a general system of moral values, identical or similar in all

industrialized and highly technological societies. This ethical monism is considered to be a consequence of economic "growth" and of the "technical and scientific revolution", irrespective of the social, political and economic macrostructures and of the characteristics specific to the social systems, developmental levels, cultural and national traditions.

2.2. The present day discussion stems from the early research in the sociology of morals carried on in the proceeding century when several authors, differing in their philosophical and political thought, pointed out, in various ways, the existence of an ethos corresponding to industrialism, centered on the values of utilitarianism. Auguste Comte considered that, along with "industrial life", the old morals, based on "theology" or "metaphisics", had to be replaced by new morals, of the "positive spirit", based on science and constructed more geometrico with "the useful" as one of the main values[2]. Taking over the traditions of utilitarianism (Bentham, Mill), sociological positivism and philosophical and ethical pragmatism have brought about new developments along the same line. Later on, analysing the ethos specific to the capitalist "spirit" (Geist), Max Weber underlins that morals centers round the "rationality of the spirit of acquisition"[3]. Carrying on in its turn utilitarianism, positivism and pragmatism, functionalism has proposed a new image for the ethos of industrial society within the same unhistorical "monist" outlook[4].

Even with authors who, within the limits of non-Marxist sociology, criticize the unhistorical character of such concepts, there appear, although in different forms, no less "universally" and "eternally", valid trends in assessing the ethos of the industrial world of science

and technology. Concerning the relative dimensions of the modification of dominant attitudes in the transition from traditional to modern society - Jürgen Habermas[5] concludes : "Subsystems of purposive - rational action do indeed demand orientation to the postponement of gratification, universal norms, individual achievement and active mastery, and specific and analytic relationship, rather than to the opposite orientations".

2.3. In contrast with the concepts mentioned above, other sociologists and theoreticians stress the polarity and the diversity of ethical orientations in the contemporary developed capitalist societies as well, emphasis being laid on the crisis of values and of the ethos. Refuting the thesis of identity between the "technological era" and the utilitarian value in ethics - the "new sociology"[6], notwithstanding the diversity of its orientations, asserts the importance of setting up a "counter-culture" which promotes values diametrically opposed to the dominant ethos of the capitalist society. Characterizing several traits of the way of living specific to this "counter-culture" of the youth in the consumer society, Laurel Langaan is referring among other things to the "anti-utilitarianism"[7] which characterises this new ethos.

2.4. On the whole it follows that:

2.4.1. In contrast with the extreme variety of positions expressed whenever sociologists set themselves the task of defining value orientations, in the first place the ethical ones, of the contemporary man - a trend has developed, expressed in various ways, but relatively unitary, according to which one is heading for (or one has already achieved) what may be called: "the convergence of the ethos of the technological era";

2.4.2. According to this orientation, utilitarianism is the guideline of the morality common to all industrial societies. The rationality of this ethos leads to the conversion of goals into means, of the final aim into an instrumental proceeding, of the intrinsic moral action into an extrinsic one. Furthermore, all values would have to be subordinated to a material outcome and the ideal to the status quo, leading to a change of transcendence into more adjustment, i.e. to the predominance of a desire for individual egotistic achievement and acquisitive behavior followed by actual social gratification;

2.4.3. The corollary of this concept is that, in the contemporary world, as a consequence of "techno-structure", of the role of industry, urbanization, science and technics - a common ethos would emerge becoming necessarily prevailing also in the socialist system. Alvin Gouldner, for instance, considers that, essentially, the socialist ethos should inevitably join the utilitarian monism of the ethos of the "technological era", Marxism itself being after all a "social utilitarianism"[d].

3. Marxism asserts the pluralism of contemporary ethos

3.1. Our viewpoint is basically opposed to this thesis considering, in the light of Marxist analysis of social genesis and dynamics of the ethos in the contemporary world, that the very sociological premises of the said arguments are mistaken.

3.2. The thesis about the "convergence" of value systems toward an ethical monism of the "technological era", is based on the theory, refuted by life, of the "convergence of systems", on the ambiguity of the concept of "technological era", in fact on the failure to understand scientifically the basic processes of the contemporary world, on the dogmatic

sacrificing of the particular within the framework of its dialectics with the general. As a result of certain processes that occur rather similary in the contemporary world, especially during the technological and techno-scientific revolution, it is, indeed, imperative to take into account also some similitudes in the development of contemporary morals[9]; in the present conditions, however, we consider it essential to underscore the pluralism of the ethos which throws into relief the diversity and, even, the opposition of social, economic and political macro-structures. What is similar, related, analogous, is thus real, but secondary, whereas what is specific, distinct in the systems of values characterizing the contemporary ethos is the main feature. The decisive proof is, undoubtedly, offered by the presence in the contemporary world of a plurality of ethical orientations as ideal-type, patterns and realities of morality. Starting from the antagonistic complexity of social classes and systems coexisting in the world of today, Marxism asserts the pluralism of the contemporary ethos.

3.3. As to the falsehood of the idea about socialist morals as ethics of social utilitarianism, a first argument would be the very consideration of the history of doctrines.

3.3.1. Even "German ideology" in its time proposed a clean-cut delimitation from utilitarianism; since for Marx and Engels, contrary to Bentham, "the relationship of usefulness" does not belong to "human nature", but has a precise meaning, namely the one that "I obtain a benefit to the prejudice of others (exploitation de l'homme par l'homme)"[10], the conclusion is self evident: limited to the circle of bourgeois conditions, the whole criticism of

the existing world, as the theory of utilitarianism has done, "changed gradually into a simple apology of the existent, in an attempt to demonstrate that, in the existing conditions, the present relations between men are allegedly the most beneficial and more generally useful"[11].

3.3.2. Furthermore, the marxist ethics reveals itself, essentially as an anti-utilitarian doctrine. It is not, of course, an ethics of asceticism: in "Manuscripts", Marx criticizes that "rudimentary communism" which denies man's personality, the whole world of culture and civilisation and proposes "the return to the unatural simplicity of the needy man devoid of necessities"[12]. But, as it is known, the moral ideal of the "rich man" is conceived in the sense of turning to good account "human usefulness", human necessities, that is those necessities in which also "the other man, as man, have become for him a necessity"[13]. Thus, the ethical communist humanism asserts itself as a moral of man's transformation from a means into a goal, as a gradual transition, as necessities are gradually more fully met, from "to have" to "to be". Without any doubt, both in the history and in the practice of socialist morals, quite a few utilitarian trends have existed and still exist; but these were or are deviations (for objective or subjective reasons) from the fundamental anti-utilitarian pattern of socialist ethics.

3.3.3. Another argument concerns the ethical realities of socialist society; with reference to contemporary Romania, it is imperative to point out that it is not "utilitarianism" but precisely the human ideal of man's social achievement and of the plenary assertion of its personality which becomes the fundamental characteristic of the moral pattern. The many-sided development of man is considered

the supreme goal of socialist society[14]. The consequence of these orientations is the code of socialist ethics and equity[15], which inscribes among its fundamental principles the achievement of human personality in the conditions of his active and creative participation to the development of society.

4. Value orientations of the socialist ethos

4.1. The answer to the theoretical controversy we have analysed, which has essential implications for contemporary education, may be given not only by confronting the theoretical arguments, but, chiefly, by studying the realities of the ethos. In this respect we shall refer to some conclusions concerning the dominants of value orientations of young people, their principal choices concerning the socialist ethos of our present-day society and of that of the future, conclusions emerging from different inquiries which we have carried on in the last few years among Romanian young people of different ages and professions, using the apropiate tools for opinion surveys - questionnaires, interviews, scales as well as means of observation, cross-studies, panels, and so on[16].

4.2. The need for an ideal. The majority of the young people investigated express their adhesion to the humanist ideal of socialism. Consonant with this orientation and refuting the contention about the global ethical "scepticism" of the contemporary younger generation, irrespective of the concrete social and ideological coordinates, the investigated subjects express, with a substantial majority, their faith in an ideal. The world most of the adolescents look forward to is not that of a "productivist" or "consumer" society, in which reification and alienation of man lead to the degradation of values and demonetization of ideals; they aspire to

a world in which to technical development, to industrialization, mechanization and automation, to technological improvements should correspound the change of social relations on the basis of equity and social justice.

In the view of these young people the socialist ethos does not mean renouncing an ideal, but, on the contrary, a permanent aspiration for an ideal; elimination of penury and organization of interhuman relations on new fondations cause and should cause "hunger for food" and the "quest for material goods" to be replaced by "hunger for ideals" and "a quest for values".

3.3. Social ethics. Young people's opinions have been studied referring to the value orientation of the ideal and, mainly, to the relationship between pragmatic (utilitarian) and social values. The results show that prevalent in their options are not pragmatic values but those linked to the social, communital achievement as the framework and the means for the assertion of personality. No matter how much, in a minority group of young people, utilitarian orientations may be discerned, characteristic is the main orientation towards social ethics. The socialist ethos is regarded by these subjects neither as a moral justification of narrow material interests, not as an ascetic repression and elimination of the latter. Repudiating individualism as well as precariousness - the ethos of the socialist society is meant to achieve the Kantian imperative of "man as an end", not only in the field of philosophical speculation or of social elites but also in that of praxis and of the common man.

3.4. Creative work. Expressing their conviction about the necessity of work, the young people emphasize the need for an ethos which, based on the values of creative work,

should generalize the criterion of effort and ability as determining factors of happiness in life attained in conditions of social equity. Most of them consider that work is an essential instrumental value whose aim is the progress of the community and the fulfillment of personality. To the tendencies emerging from other surveys (repudiation of work as fundamentally alienating, i.e. "drop-out" attitudes) - the young people questioned opposed the aspiration to transform work from disypnoeic toil into Prometheun creative activity.

4.5. Pluri-dimensional fulfillment of personality. The perspective of man's losing his individuality in the mass, of his depersonalization by the reduction of autonomy to heteronomy, of originality to norm, of individuality to the common, prophesied by many theoreticians as inevitable in the conditions of contemporary technical development, is not considered by many of the young people investigated as something inevitable. Conversely, the "right to personality" emerges clearly as a characteristic feature of the desired ethos of socialist society. Based on a society of justice and equity, with material and spiritual progress in full being, - socialist morals aims not only at the many-sided achievement of personality but at the achievement of pluri-dimensional and multiform personalities as well.

4.6. The opinion of young people about the socialist ethos expresses a point of view - partly positive, partly critical - concerning the moral principles and norms existing in society, in whose light are educated or which characterizes the actual behavior of the present young generation; at the same time, prospectively, it reflects the relationship between the adolescent's view about the

possible, necessary or desired future evolution of this ethos, the transcendence of the present.

The investigation of the moral orientations of young people has thus confirmed the *genesis of a new ethos*[17] specific to the socio-economic structural changes of *Rumanian society*, including the *impact* of the techno-scientific revolution in condition proper to the latter. This ethos proves to be different and in some respects at variance, with the *utilitarian ethics* of the "*technological era*", professed or advocated by some sociologists. It is obvious that, both the *diversity of value orientations ascertained* and the *discrepancies between ideal and reality, between patterns and behaviours, reveal the dialectics of ethos development* which in socialism, as well, presupposes the *gradual overcoming of various contradictions and dysfunctions occurring in the field of morals*. The characteristic feature of this process, however, is *the orientations towards building up of a new ethos* corresponding to the needs of social maturation, achieved by the transformation of praxis on the basis of the ideal value system of socialist ethics.

3. [illegible]

3.1. In order to increase its contribution to the definition of the aims, orientations and ways of perfecting contemporary education, we believe that *sociology* should add to the studies devoted directly to teaching-learning processes those referring to the *contradictory dynamics of ethics*.

The sociology of morals has had a peculiar fate in the overall development of sociology: while in this century

of uninterrupted although non-lineary and, sometims, contradictory assertion of sociology, a continous and quasi entropic proliferation of the latter's disciplines has taken place, the sociology of morals has died out as such. Neverthelass it has not ceased to exist, but on the one hand it has been included in the great sociological theories (the case of the Parsonsian system is typical in this respect) and on the other hand, it developed under the form of different field sociologies such as those of work, education, aspirations, law, religion, family, youth, and so on. The amplitude and depth of the ethical challenges of contemporary world; the dimensions of the changes which the social and techno-scientific revolution have brought about in the moral profile of contemporary man and in the character of moral relationships in present-day societies; the controversies about the ethical objectives of present-day and future economic and social development, about the moral foundations of revolution and science, including those of education in present and future societies - all these tendencies make it imperative, in our view, for sociology to study the complex problems of moral reality and, implicitily prove the possibility and necessity of a "sociology of morals". One of our conclusions is, therefore, the need for a renewal of the sociology of morals on Marxist basis[18].

5.2. Starting from the complexity of contemporary and future processes, including those of the impact of technological and scientific development upon education - we believe that the reappraisal of finalities and functionalities of the latter as an axiological education is imperative. Indeed, to an ever increasing degree, teaching, learning and generally education should mean not only transmission of information

and development of knowledge, but also creation of habits and moulding of character, not only teaching for science but also education for the sake of conscience. Based on the sociology of education and of morals - axiological education has to pursue the plenary assertion of human capacities, the many-sided and pluriform development of individualities capable at the same time, of identifying themselves with society and of becoming active factors of its progress by subordinating economic, technological and scientific development to the goals of humanism, regarded in the concrete historical context of each given society.

5.3. In the further course of the processes that have taken place so far in the conditions of industrial revolution and of technic-scientific revolution, some sociologists forecast a hyperorganized world, where norm will have the ascendancy over autonomy, and "massification" will increase, leading to a more accentuated one-dimensional, alienated and dehumanized personality. Acknowledging the possibility and danger of such an evolution if scientism and productivism were further convert technics from means into a goal, and man, from a goal into means, Marxism refutes the inevitability of such a perspective. Marxism is a consistent humanism especially for the reason that, starting from the social-historical and ethical determination of the economical and techno-scientific development, it sustains the possibility and necessity of conscious actions of man meant to balance the objective needs of the growth of social control by subordinating them to the pluri-dimensional and pluriform assertion of personality, as an autonomous being in the option process, socially warranted and educationally stimulated. It is

imperative in this respect to promote, as part of contemporary education a "pedagogy of choice" whose principal requirements are: the stimulation of the active and creative status of the subject in the education process, placing him in position of choice and guiding his free and conscious option towards the most advanced alternatives; the increase of the role of selfeducation; the education of a diversity of personalities towards their many-sided and pluriform fulfillment, value-oriented but unstandardized; the permanent assertion of the freedom and autonomy of personality as the basis of its real socialization.

To the need of approaching the problems of the relationship between technology, science and education by means of the sociology of morals as well as of developing axiological education, we add in this respect the requirement of promoting a pedagogy of choice.

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00016

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00017